

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

*“HHS has advocated that states understand the needs of special populations, including the elderly, when devising and exercising their emergency preparedness plans.”*

DHHS Secy. Mike Leavitt

Dear Aging Service Network Colleague:

The beginning of the hurricane season serves as an important reminder that advanced planning, prevention, communication, and coordinated partnerships are critical for helping to ensure the safety and ongoing care of older persons before, during and after emergency events. We know that to reduce the impact of disasters, emergencies, and severe public health events, such as a pandemic flu, pre-planning is essential. The purpose of this note is to ask for your support and action to review your disaster plans, update them and to know who your key colleagues are in the event a disaster strikes.

As we work to prepare for disasters, as well as a possible pandemic flu, please make sure that your agency is part of the planning processes going on in your state. Principally through CDC and HRSA, funds were provided to States and localities to upgrade infectious disease surveillance and investigation, enhance the readiness of hospitals and the health care system to deal with large numbers of casualties, expand public health laboratory and communications capacities and improve connectivity between hospitals, and city, local and state health departments to enhance disease reporting - including the funding requested for FY 2007, CDC and HRSA's investments since 2001 total almost \$8 billion.

As you develop your plans and addressing issues such as communication, assessment, surveillance, staff training and the coordination of resources, you also need to know the locations of your special populations. Please seek the perspectives and assistance of consumers where possible. It is also important to recognize the different disaster response strategies to an infectious disease occurrence such as the pandemic flu vs. a response to a natural disaster such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes or earthquakes. Thus, it is important to ensure that plans address these various methods, one of which is to have people stay home and the other is to get people to safe shelters.

Attached to this letter is a list of important resources to help you in this process. Thank you for your dedication and for taking the time to make sure we are all more prepared during the next emergency, disaster or flu pandemic.

Sincerely,

Josefina G. Carbonell  
Assistant Secretary for Aging

We have developed the following resources to help you in this process:

### **Resources on Emergency Preparedness**

- Strategies that involve best practice information and new technologies can be accessed at the HHS web site: <http://www.hhs.gov/emergency/index.shtml>.
- Based on lessons learned and input from representatives throughout the aging services network, AoA has updated its emergency guide for taking a coordinated systems approach to disaster preparedness for the elderly. This guide can be accessed at <http://www.aoa.gov/PRESS/preparedness/preparedness.asp>.
- An *emergency preparedness fact sheet and checklist* that older persons and their caregivers can use to make personal plans and have appropriate supplies on hand to meet essential needs during an emergency can be accessed at: [www.aoa.gov/PROF/aoaprof/caregiver/overview/Just\\_in\\_Case030706\\_links.pdf](http://www.aoa.gov/PROF/aoaprof/caregiver/overview/Just_in_Case030706_links.pdf).

### **Resources on Preparing and Responding to Pandemic Influenza**

Additionally, past pandemics occurred in multiple “waves” of infection. This situation poses serious challenges for assisting home-bound and vulnerable seniors given that worker and volunteer absenteeism could reach 40% for weeks at a time due to illness, the need to care for ill family members, and the fear of infection. Planning strategies are available at: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>, including the federal plan, HHS plans, state plans and checklists. As part of this information, HHS has published two checklists that are of particular importance to the older people we serve:

- A *Home Health Care Services Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist* identifies key areas for pandemic influenza planning that home health care organizations can use to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current planning efforts. This checklist can be accessed at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/healthcare.html>.
- A *Long-Term Care and Other Residential Facilities Pandemic Influenza Checklist* provides guidance for these facilities to assess and improve their preparedness for responding to pandemic influenza. This resource tool can be accessed at: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/LongTermCareChecklist.html>.

Additionally, AoA’s Pandemic Flu Plan, which is designed to provide a framework for AoA’s activities related to preparing for and responding to a pandemic outbreak, may be accessed at: <http://www.aoa.gov/press/preparedness/preparedness.asp>.